

Message Text

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ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CU-04 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 779

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS' TS

SUBJECT: STRIKE AT UNIVERSITY

REF: TUNIS 7069, DEC. 21, 1973

1. SUMMARY: LONG SIMMERING STUDENT DISCONTENT ERUPTED IN FACULTY OF SCIENCE ON JANUARY 3, WHEN FORMER STUDENT ATTENDING STUDENT MEETING CLASHED WITH DEAN. FOLLOWING POLICE INTERVENTION, SCIENCE STUDENTS WENT STRIKE, AND BY FEB. 6 STRIKE HAD SPREAD TO ALL OTHER FACULTIES. FUNDAMENTAL GRIEVANCES WERE REFUSAL BY AUTHORITIES TO PERMIT STUDENTS TO ORGANIZE UGET CONGRESS WITH DELEGATIONS ELECTED BY STUDENTS, POLICE REPRESSION AND DRAFTING INTO ARMY OF STUDENT LEADERS. NO EVIDENCE THAT STRIKE CONNECTED WITH BROADER POLITICAL ISSUES SUCH AS UNION WITH LIBYA. GOVERNMENT APPEARS PREPARED LET STRIKE SIMMER BEFORE TAKING MORE DRASTIC ACTION. END SUMMARY.

2. TROUBLE AT UNIVERSITY APPARENTLY BEGAN THURSDAY, JA. 31 WHEN DEAN OF FACULTY OF SCIENCE SOUGHT TO BREAK UP STUDENT MEETING WHICH DEAN SAID PREVENTING NORMAL CLASSES FROM TAKING PLACE. AFTER FORMER STUDENT ATTENDING MEETING TO DISCUSS STUDENT GRIEVANCES CLASHED WITH DEAN, POLICE WERE CALLED IN AND VIOLENT CONFRONTATION ENSUED WITH STUDENTS AT CAFETERIA. IN PROTEST AGAINST CALLING OF
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POLICE, STUDENTS AT FACULTY OF SCIENCE CALLED STRIKE
FEB. 1 WHICH CONTINUED THROUGH FEB. 5.

3. MORNING FEB. 5, WHICH ALSO HAPPENED TO BE SECOND
ANNIVERSARY OF 1972 CLOSING OF UNIVERSITY BECAUSE OF STUDENT
STRIKE, STUDENTS AT FACULTY OF SCIENCE MET AGAIN TO DISCUSS
SITUATION AS WELL AS OTHER LONGTIME STUDENT ISSUES (ESPECIALLY
REPRESENTATION IN THE STUDENT UNION). DEAN OF FACULTY
REPORTEDLY ENTERED MEETING, SAID MEETING ILLEGAL, AND
ORDERED STUDENTS TO DISPERSE. SEVERAL STUDENTS PROTESTED,
POINTING OUT THEY WERE HARMING NO ONE, ONLY HAVING PEACEABLE
MEETING TO DISCUSS CURRENT SITUATION AND EVENTS. REPORTEDLY
DEAN AGAIN INSULTED BY ONE OF STUDENT LEADERS (ONE REPORT
SAYS DEAN WAS HIT BY STUDENT AS WELL). POLICE AGAIN
CALLED IN AND ARRESTED SEVERAL STUDENT LEADERS.

4. AS RESULT, ALL OTTHER FACULTIES JOINED STRIKE ON
FEB. 6 AND AS OF TODAY, FEB. 8, ONLY STUDENTS ATTENDING CLASSES
ARE THOSE PREPARING FOR FINAL EXAMS. WHILE POLICE WERE
VERY MUCH IN EVIDENCE ON FEB. 6, MAINLY CONCENTRATING ON
KEEPING STUDENTS FROM GATHERING IN GROUPS, POLICE
NO LONGER IN EVIDENCE AND THERE NO FURTHER REPORT
OF VIOLENCE.

5. ALL FOUR DAILY PAPERS FEB. 7 CARRIED REPORT OF TELEGRAM
FROM SOME PARENTS TO SURETE NATIONALE ASKING POLICE TO
END " AGITATION" AND ENABLE STUDENTS RETURN TO SCHOOL.
UNIVERSITY OFFICIALS HAVE MIMEOGRAPHED AND DISTRIOUTED TO
STUDENTS OFFICIAL REPORT OF DEAN OF FACULTY OF SCIENCE
COVERING EVENTS FROM JAN . 31 - FEB. 4. REPORT SAYS THERE
WERE TWO ISSUES IN CURRENT STRIKE -- DETENTION AND
DRAFTING INTO ARMY OF STUDENT LEADERS, AND FAILURE TO PERMIT
STUDENTS TO ORGANIZE UGET CONGRESS WITH DELEGATIONS ELECTED
BY STUDENTS. UNIVERSITY AUTHORITIES SAY STRIKE IS
"LEADERLESS", WHICH MAKES IT MORE DIFFICULT TO
NEGOTIATE RETURN TO CLASSES.

6. COMMENT: BECAUSE OF FOLLOWING FUNDAMENTAL STUDENT
GRIEVANCES STRIKE SPREAD QUICKLY: STUDENT BELIEF THEY
INADEQUATELY REPRESENTED, POLICE REPRESSION AND GOT
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POLICY OF DRAFTING STUDENT LEADERS INTO ARMY. THERE
NO EVIDENCE THAT ANY NATIONAL ISSUES, SUCH AS UNION WITH
LIBYA, CONTRIBUTED TO STRIKE. CURRENT UNIVERSITY TROUBLES
ARE SOMEWHAT EMBARRASSING TO GOVERNMENT, SINCE STRIKE
HAS BEEN RESPECTED BY VIRTUALLY ALL STUDENTS AND SINCE
IT COMES ON HEELS OF NOUIRA SPEECH CALLING FOR NATIONAL
UNITY AT TIME GOT FACING UNION ISSUE (TUNIS 643).
HOWEVER, GOT APPEARS PREPARED LET STRIKE SIMMER BEFORE

TAKING ANY ACTION THAT MIGHT LEAD TO MORE SERIOUS SITUATION.
PUBLICATION OF "PARENTS" TELGRAM TO SURETE" APPEARS SO
FAR TO BE ONLY ATTEMPT TO ENCOURAGE STUDENTS RETURN
TO CLASSES.
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